

FORT FISHER'S STORY

A FIERCE ASSAULT AND GALLANT DEFENSE THIRTY YEARS AGO.

Terrible Bombardment Waged For Two Days by 45 Union Warships—Heroic Fighting When Terry's Soldiers Stormed the Palisades and Ramparts.

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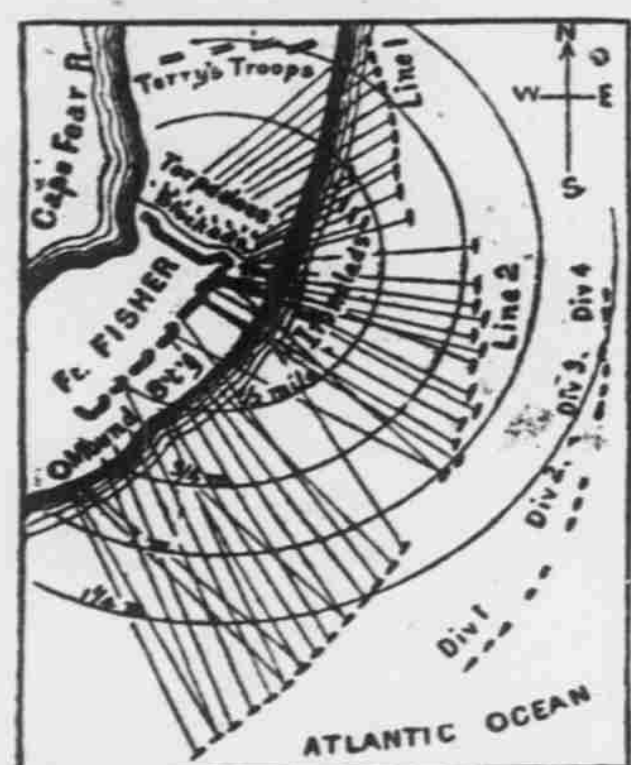
FORT FISHER, N. C., the most powerful earthwork in the Confederacy, was carried by a bold Union assault on Jan. 15, 1865, after a heavy naval bombardment. The Union transport fleet sailed from Fort Monroe Jan. 6. The force was led by Major General Alfred H. Terry and numbered 8,000 men. Terry's orders were sealed and were to be opened when he was out at sea. His destination was not known to any one in the army or navy, except those who had to know it. Terry himself was ignorant of it until he broke the seals of his instructions out at sea. In these instructions he was told to communicate freely with Admiral D. D. Porter and seek to have entire harmony between the army and navy in the expedition. Porter had a total of 45 vessels, which he formed in three lines, with a reserve. During the night they anchored off Fort Fisher, and on the morning of the 13th the new Ironsides ran up to within 1,000 yards. Some of the Ironsides reached as near as 700 yards and got into position under a heavy fire. The landing of Terry's men was covered by several vessels not engaged in the bombardment. The troops went ashore on the sea beach about five miles above the fort and between it and the entrenched camps of Bragg's army of Wilmington. By 2 o'clock p. m. the troops and stores were safely landed, and General Faine's colored division pushed forward to Cape Fear river, the other side of the peninsula. Here a line of defenses was begun in order to repel any advance of the Confederates from Wilmington. It was seen that the fire from the navy was doing much damage, and an assault was determined upon for the afternoon of the 13th. Terry was to send in three brigades, in columns of a brigade front, to storm the land side, while 3,000 sailors and marines should assail the works on the sea-side.

The Confederate garrison of the fort numbered 1,500 men. General Whiting had entered the fort from Wilmington on the 13th, after the Union army and troops appeared, and had told the commandant, Colonel Lamb, that he and his command were to be left to their fate, for General Bragg was looking for a position to which to retreat.

The preparations for assault were discovered in the fort, and an attempt was made to confuse the columns by firing grape, but the storms of shot that swept the works from navy guns cut down the Confederates' cannoners at an appalling rate, and it was evident that the danger could only be averted by hand to hand struggles on the walls. At 3 o'clock, promptly the signal was given by the noise of more than 50 steam whistles of the Union fleet, and the land column sprang forward to the charge.

General Curtis' brigade had the lead and pushed forward to the northwest bastion, near the river. The Confederates were seen to man the parapets the moment the naval fire ceased, which was done to allow the Union troops to move up. Colonel Lamb judged by the soul stirring whistles that the hour had come, and he desired to receive the assailants on his torpedoes as soon as they reached the walls. Leaving instructions with the commander of the northwest front, he went to the angle of the works where the naval column had been sighted, fearing that that was the vital point. The sailors had landed successfully and halted beyond rifle range under cover of the sand hills that formed the surface of the beach. The men were in one long line and made a formidable show, descending the enemy into the belief that this was the main assault and dividing his garrison. At the signal the sailors moved down the beach, sheltered by a line of sand hills, and then turned squarely upon the fort. But the batteries farther down the Confederate line could sweep the stretch of beach, which at that point was nearly half a mile wide, and the muskets in the fort did terrible execution. Three cannon in the fort poured canister into the assailants, and both General Whiting and Colonel Lamb stood on the parapet cheering the men at their work.

The sailors were unaccustomed to land maneuvers and very soon showed the seriousness of this defect. Their officers, among them the gallant Lieutenant W. B. Cushing, rallied and led them as well



STORMED AT ON ALL SIDES.

as possible, but the forward columns halted under the walls of the fort, lying down to escape the fire from above, and the rear columns on closing up did the same. The delay thus caused was fatal. The Confederates were cheered by the sight of a sort of panic that had seized these novice in war and turned away to receive the land column, which was announced to be close at hand by the sharp musketry and the booming of grape shot guns on the north front. Simultaneously Whiting and Lamb saw in that direction three of General Curtis' battleflags on the ramparts adjoining the northwest bastion.

Curtis' advance had not been without difficulty. At places the hollows in the sand were filled with water, and this had to be waded through, at some points waist deep. The fire from the fort was scattering, but when the palisades were reached they could not be scaled and had to be cut

away. When Curtis' flags crowned the breastworks, the division commander, General Ames, who was up at the front, immediately ordered Colonel Pennypacker's brigade to his support, for the first success was no more than a lodgment. The stronghold was in the shotproof chambers, where every foot of ground could be disputed, and to the defense of them the Confederates rallied. General Whiting, moving down the line from right to left, had led some men to the first chamber, held by Curtis, and succeeded in recovering that and the adjoining parapets, although he received wounds that cost him his life.

Colonel Lamb had gone outside the parapets in order to get a view of the distant parts. He found the front covered with assailants, and also discovered that his torpedo wires had been destroyed by the navy shots that had plowed the sand many feet deep, and these terrible weapons were useless. But the garrison was fighting bravely, and Lamb cheered them with the hope that the fort could be held until dark, when Bragg would come to their aid. His sharpshooters cut down all the Union color bearers, and the hostile flags vanished from the outer walls. The traverses which intersected the parapets every few yards now became barricades, over which the combatants fought, often at arm's length.

The naval column was out of the fight entirely, and the guns on the vessels kept up a steady fire along the sea face wall, where the sailors had been repulsed. Gradually taking a wider target, they poured their shots into the active Confederate batteries. This greatly demoralized the garrison, and the assault was rapidly pushed by the remainder of General Ames' division. Colonel Bell's brigade was ordered up to the angle where the land face and the sea face joined, but the advance, though bravely made, was checked by sharp musketry fire from the Confederate traverses.

It now became a stubborn fight in every sense of the word, but the Union had a little chance of unity. The Confederates or U. S. traverses, ranged all along the rear, and extending 90 feet to the rear, their shotproof sides and numerous passages, were so many little forts, and the capture of any one of them by Terry's men simply drove the defenders back to another one. The Confederates, having the interior and knowing the ground, were able to haul cannon out of the gun chambers and fire across the space where the assailants must advance. But the entering wedge had been driven by Curtis' brigade. The portion of the works held by him was a protection to a flanking column which formed on the interior of the main para-



COLONEL WILLIAM LAMB, COMMANDANT AT FORT FISHER.

pet and swept around in rear of the row of traverses. This compelled the garrison to come out of their citadels and fight in open ground or be captured in them. For a time the Confederates met this flank attack from behind an old breastwork that extended along the interior plane of the inclosure. Colonel Lamb, who was alive to every opportunity to dispute Terry's advance, now went along the batteries south toward the point and directed a heavy fire to be thrown into the northwest portion of the work, where the danger was so threatening. On his way he ordered every available man forward to the first traverse ahead of Terry's men, and on his return he found that traverse still held by his stubborn soldiers, although the slaughter among them had been appalling. The fire from the fleet had scooped out graves in the sand, and his dead were lying in them as they fell, half buried by the showers of dust thrown out from the bursting shells. Great timbers, gun carriages, and even cannon, broken by the huge missiles from the fleet, were lying in heaps, and on and around them were the dead who had vainly tried to defend them.

The advance of Terry's men had been arrested, and Colonel Lamb summoned all his force to the front traverse, with the determination to charge upon the assailants and drive them out. Signals were sent to the gunners in the fort to withhold their countercharge. The distance between the combatants was not above a hundred feet, and calling on men and officers to follow Lamb leaped the breastworks, with the order: "Charge bayonets! Forward! Double quick! March!" Instantly a Union bullet entered his right hip, and he sank on the works. Terry's men poured a heavy volley of bullets into the Confederates, and the latter fell back behind cover. Colonel Lamb was taken to a bomb-proof and the command given to Major James Reilly, who agreed to continue the struggle as long as he had a man left. But this effort of the Confederates depleted their ranks on the traverses, and a new Union force under Colonel Abbott, on the left of Ames' brigades, captured some of the traverses between Ames' position and the sea. The land force was now held at bay only around the Sally port. In another hour the Sally port had been carried, leaving nothing to oppose Terry's advance.

Continued defense being useless without reinforcements, a rear guard was formed from the sound men of the garrison, and the sick and wounded were sent on ahead with their leaders, Whiting and Lamb. The Confederate rear guard made the best fight they could, only yielding inch by inch, and it was 10 o'clock, or seven hours after the fight began, when the last traverse and battery were in Terry's hand.

The victory was complete, but it had been gained at heavy cost. The three brigade commanders of Ames' division had been stricken down on the works.

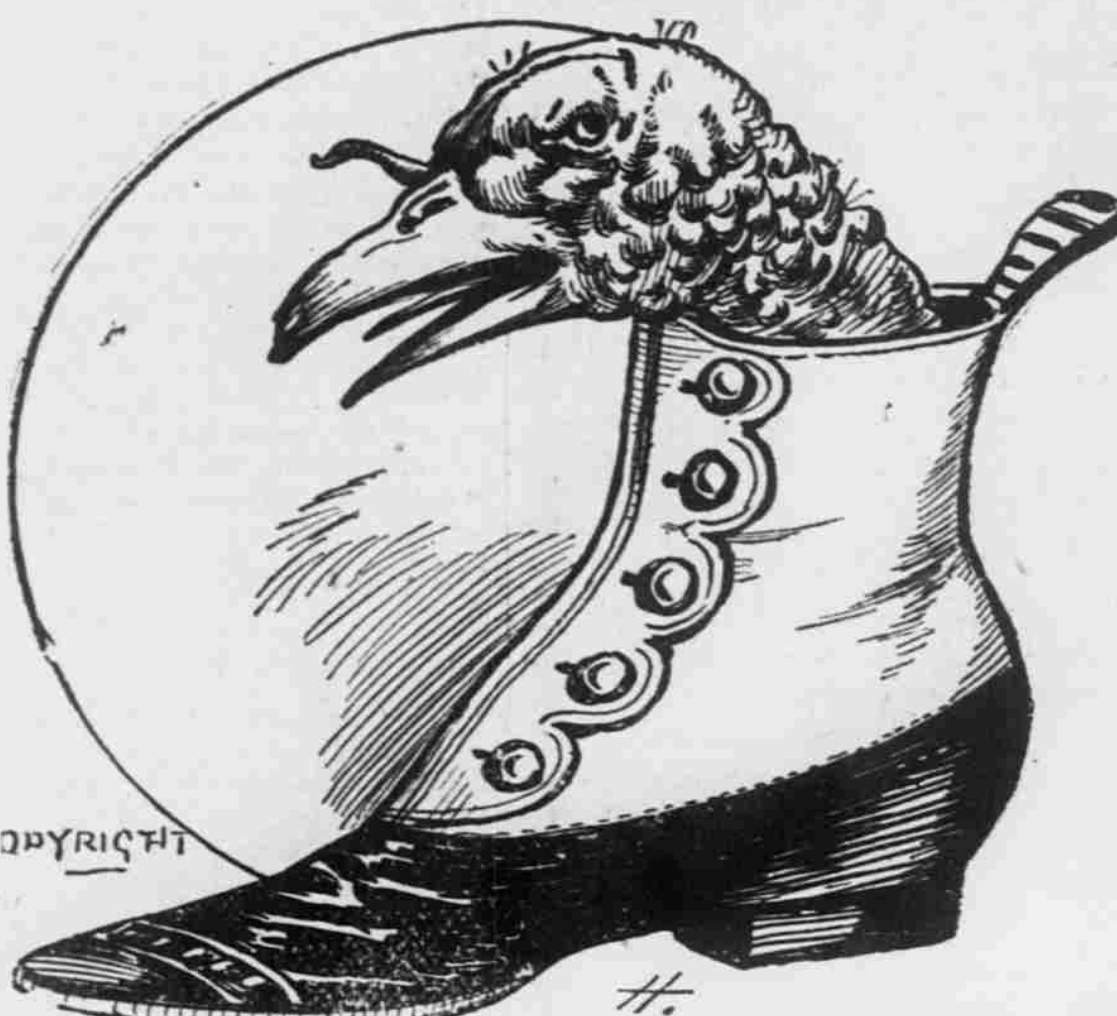
From beginning to end the situation on both sides was desperate in the extreme. The men pent up in the fort were at the mercy of the guns on the vessels, which practically surrounded the work, and those engaged in storming faced the blazing rifles and cannon on the walls. Only a courage that was peerless could sustain a battle seven hours under such conditions.

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An address will be delivered by

E. L. Brown, Ph.D.

(Professor of Pedagogy, University of California).

Short addresses will be delivered by

PRESIDENT HOSMER,
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